

When Families Struggle With SUDs, the Stigma They Experience Hurts the Children

When working with children and young adults in families impacted by substance use disorders (SUDs), give them age-appropriate information – in language they can understand – to validate their experience and provide support. Avoid providing too much so they end up confused and overwhelmed. Helping them understand what the disease of addiction is, and that it isn't their fault, can lessen the impact of stigma.



When Talking To Children

- The preferred term is addiction. It can refer to alcohol, other substances, and tobacco.
- Words like stuck, hooked, and trapped help children to understand what addiction is.
- Keep it simple, concrete, and to the point.

When Talking to Teens

- Speak in an age-appropriately about substance use disorders (SUDs) with appropriate terminology, as you would with other diseases.
- Discuss the higher risks children with blood relatives of those with SUDs have to develop SUDs themselves. They can lower this risk by learning about the disease, asking for help from safe people, and by practicing self-care.
- You cannot control your loved one and are not responsible for the feelings of others.
- It's okay to tell the truth, even if someone gets in trouble or gets angry.
- It's okay to keep yourself and others safe.
- People can, and do get better.
- You have strengths, people who care for you, and positive ways you can express your feelings.
- Explain to teens about the changes that may take place in families when a parent is in early recovery, how to support their parent (s), and how to take care of themselves.

For Kids and Teens

- Help kids and teens to separate the person they love from the disease of addiction. Someone is not a bad person because they have a disease.
- Teach kids and teens experientially about denial, loss of control (can't stop), recurrence/relapse, and treatment and recovery.
- Incorporate the Seven Cs. It helps children understand what they can't change and empowers them to help take care of themselves in the ways they can.
- **You are not alone. You are valued. And you deserve support.**

The Seven Cs

I didn't **CAUSE** it. I can't **CONTROL** it. I can't **CURE** it. I can take better **CARE** of myself by **COMMUNICATING** my feelings, making healthy **CHOICES**, and **CELEBRATING** myself.

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